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Maternal Risk Anxiety in Belfast

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Title *Maternal Risk Anxiety in Belfast: Claims, Evaluations, Responses*

Abstract

This paper considers the social logic of maternal anxiety about risks posed to children in segregated, post-conflict neighbourhoods. Focusing on qualitative research with mothers in Belfast's impoverished and divided inner city, the paper draws on the interactionist perspective in the sociology of emotions to explore the ways in which maternal anxiety drives claims for recognition of good mothering, through orientations to these neighbourhoods. Drawing on Hirschman's model of exit, loyalty and voice types of situated action, the paper examines the relationship between maternal risk anxiety and evaluations of neighbourhood safety. In arguing that emotions are important aspects of claims for social recognition, the paper demonstrates that anxiety provokes efforts to claim status, in this context through the explicit affirmation of non-sectarian mothering.

Keywords

anxiety, Belfast, mothers, non-sectarianism, recognition, status.

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How do inner city mothers in Belfast, particularly those raising young children in the first decade of the post-conflict era, negotiate a shifting normative landscape? How do they seek affirmation concerning the quality of their mothering in a changed context? These questions are explored in what follows through a focus on the social logic of maternal anxiety, the evaluative responses it generates (Burkitt 2012; Kemper 1978: 41), and its significance as a guide to the actions of mothers to the neighbourhoods where they live in Belfast's inner city, which continues to be divided and strongly marked by sectarian hostilities, as well as sporadic violence (Shirlow 2008).

This paper aims to contribute to our understanding of the significance of emotions for status claims. In so doing, social emotions, such as anxiety, are treated not as psychic pathologies, or as reflections of the strain of structural imperatives to conform (Barbalet 2001; Hochschild 1979). Instead, they are understood to be important aspects of claims for social recognition, that is, claims for verification of the actor's authoritative status (Crossley 2011; Honneth 1995; McBride 2013), what Weber described as a 'social estimation of honor' (1948: 186-7). Emotions are consequently understood as a central feature of agency, providing feedback to the self as a guide to further action (Burke and Stets 2009). Anxiety, for instance, is treated as a sign of insufficient power and status (Kemper 1978: 49), signaling actor unease both over the authority of specific actions (Denzin 2007; Kemper 1978; Lynd 1958), and more generally over the validity of the claim to be recognized as an authoritative actor.

The classed and gendered character of maternal anxiety is examined in what follows through a focus on the relationship between the social dynamics of this emotion in the inner city, and what Hirschman (1970) identified as 'exit, loyalty and voice' types of attitudes, in this case towards segregated, multiply deprived residential neighbourhoods. What follows firstly

considers the gendered character of contemporary parenting, and particularly the relationship between motherhood and anxiety, before examining the character of maternal recognition claims, notably through affirming boundaries of respectability and stigma, and through orientations to neighbourhoods.

The Social Politics of Motherhood: Norms, Conflict, Anxiety

Parenting remains a strongly gendered practice, with distinct social expectations attached to motherhood and fatherhood (Craig et al. 2014; Rose et al. 2015; Thomas and Hildingsson 2009). Doucet (2015) argues, drawing on feminist debates about the ethics of care, that parental responsibility, understood as a sense of obligation not only to provide practical care, but also to assume a generally attentive and responsive attitude towards those being cared for, remains largely gendered. This is despite changes in how caregiving tasks and time are shared between mothers and fathers (e.g. Kaufman 2013). As she argues, gendered parenting is not simply a matter of equally sharing household and care tasks, but more broadly reflects a ‘state of mind’, or orientation towards the role of parent, an effect of gender norms.

Mothers continue to be positioned as the primary parent, both in law and in social life, with the consequence that motherhood tends to be associated with distinct emotional dynamics (Hildingsson and Thomas 2013; Warner 2006). Anxiety in particular, an anticipatory emotion reflecting confidence in one’s competence as an agent, is a significant aspect of motherhood, an effect of the gendered quality of social power and status (Kemper 1978: 66-7). Indeed, maternal anxiety is the focus of much sociological and psychological research (e.g. Glasheen et al. 2010; Hays 1996; Longhurst 2008; Warner 2006). By contrast, the lack of attention to a phenomenon of ‘paternal anxiety’ suggests that fatherhood may involve less anticipatory self-feelings and more ‘consequent’ emotions, those retrospective evaluations of one’s specific

actions, rather than of one's self (Kemper 1978: 49). This may explain why men are able to opt out of essential care-giving without compromising their sense of themselves as good, involved fathers, (Craig 2006; Rose et al. 2015; Thomas and Hildingsson 2009).

The effort to parent well against this background of gendered role expectations draws mothers in particular into what Scott et al (1998) describe as ever-increasing 'risk anxiety' about their children. This involves endlessly monitoring and responding to perceived threats to safety, especially those posed to one's children from others and the wider environment, including those posed by one's children to other people, including other children (Scott et al. 1998: 689). Responsibility for assessing and preventing harms to children is increasingly borne by parents, rather than by experts and state agencies, as trust in these institutions has faded (Reich 2014; Warner 2006).

Indeed, the effort to protect children from potential harm often focuses on sexual risk, as indicated by the emergence 'stranger danger' education campaigns, as well as the politicisation of child sex abuse (Bell 2002; Lorentzen 2013). As Scott and colleagues argue, while risk of sexual harm to children is actually posed primarily by familiar people rather than strangers, parental anxiety about 'stranger danger', and more recently paedophilia, although disproportionate to the risk, nevertheless does have a social logic (1998: 693). The moral norms associated with parenting tend to generate morally oriented actions as the role is activated in specific situations (Stets and Carter 2012: 124). The presence of unsupervised children in public places does tend to generate moral concerns about the quality of parenting (Wyness 1994). When parental duties are highlighted in this way, it guides the turn towards increased anxiety about child safety and surveillance of children's activities, however apparently disproportionate or irrational. The significance of gender as a source of unequal social status

(Ridgeway and Bourg 2004) means that mothers are particularly susceptible to anxiety, as they feel the authority of their actions as competent parents to be continuously in question. Maternal anxieties and fears are neither primal nor entirely personal, but instead reflect the strains and recognition conflicts of the context where they take shape (Robin 2004: 11).

Our interest in feeling at ease and claiming status as competent social actors involves the habitual effort to interpret signs of risk and danger successfully (Bourdieu 1977: 4; Goffman 1971: 249). Goffman argues that feeling at ease depends on being able to read and respond appropriately to relevant social cues, a skill which is only mastered through long-term familiarity with the context (1971: 249). That this sort of competence is more practical than cognitive explains why people tend to feel most at ease not in the most objectively safe places, but in those places where they have greatest experience, where they are able to cope best with the world around them, namely their homes, neighbourhoods, schools and places of work (Warr 1990: 893-5).

This takes on a particular intensity in contexts such as Belfast, marked by a history of inter-group hostility and violence (Shirlow and Murtagh 2006). Despite the peace agreement reached in 1998, and the subsequent establishment of a relatively non-violent society (Mac Ginty and du Toit 2007), segregation remains, and conflicting neighbourhoods are physically separated by 'peace walls' in some instances (Leonard and McKnight 2011). A sense of personal safety in those areas of the city most marked by sectarian violence depends on being able to 'tell' or read a person's ethno-nationality from indicators such as where they are located in public space, as the fear of breaching spatial boundaries tends to support ongoing segregation (Burton 1978). The detailed quality of this spatial segregation, which can change from one end of a street to another, is important in sustaining wider social divisions (Peach 2000). While

often not immediately obvious to the casual observer, it nevertheless acts as a crucial, if imperfect, clue about the identity of those in specific places, especially when more overt signals, such as colour-coded clothing referring to the flags of one or other nationality, Irish or British, are missing.

Feeling that one is doing a good job as a mother is not easy in such a context, and is distinct from mothering during times of conflict, where women are often raising children as lone parents, possibly with extended female family members to assist, following the deaths or executions of men. The struggle to simply survive, often in the face of fear, poverty, trauma, poor health and dispossession, tends to define mothering during periods of political conflict (McElroy et al. 2010; Robertson and Duckett 2007). Motherhood also tends to become explicitly politicized during conflicts, symbolizing collective struggle, sacrifice and hopefulness, whether in radical, nationalist or religious terms (e.g. Aretxaga 1997; Peteet 1997; Zaatari 2006).

Mothering in post-conflict situations is distinct from this, as the emphasis turns towards securing long-term stability (e.g. Taylor et al. 2011). Nevertheless, the experience of violence does continue to influence post-conflict mothering (Merrilees et al. 2011). Women currently raising children in Belfast's inner city are no longer doing so in a situation where their husbands, fathers, brothers, boyfriends have been injured, killed or imprisoned. The intensity of wartime collective emotions, especially fear, anger and hatred, have abated to some extent, and the risks associated with sectarian activity, including long-term imprisonment, severe injury or death, have reduced. Thus, fear of possible direct involvement in violence has been replaced by a less focused set of anxieties (Barbalet 2001: 156), such as that one's children may be exposed to or become involved in lower-level sectarian encounters or general anti-

social behaviour (Taylor et al. 2011). Anxiety about the potential stigma of being perceived oneself as a bad mother, for instance by raising sectarian or ‘anti-social’ children, is also not insignificant.

The effort to feel that one is mothering well in post-conflict contexts tends to involve responding with caution to the possibility of outbreaks of inter-group hostility in everyday life, alongside the more ‘ordinary’ anxieties about threats from reckless motorists and sexual predators. Furthermore, when parents find themselves worrying not about risks from strangers or long-standing adversaries, but about the threat posed by ‘anti-social’ children and young people in their own neighbourhood, the job of parenting seems yet more difficult and attitudes to the neighbourhood, whether those of loyalty and ‘voice’, or detachment and exit, are activated.

Responding to Risk Anxiety: Status and Stigma, Exit and Voice

What follows explores the ways in which inner city mothers in Belfast experience and respond to typical anxiety about their ability to protect their young children from risk (Wyness 1994). These anxieties are somewhat intensified in Belfast by anxiety about sectarianism, particularly for those living in what are referred to as ‘interface’ areas, that is, those ‘locations where Catholics and Protestants live side by side in mutually exclusive social worlds [...] in such a way that difference is sustained’ (Leonard 2006: 227).

The research focuses on residents of these segregated areas, which are characterised by multiple and high levels of deprivation (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency 2010). The emphasis is on the quality of maternal anxiety and the evaluative responses to the social dynamics of these neighbourhoods that it generates (Kemper 1978: 47).

The Study

What follows draws on qualitative interviews with 39 Catholic and Protestant mothers of pre-school aged children during 2009-10, living in segregated areas of inner north and east Belfast. The aim was to examine the everyday urban lives of mothers raising very young children in those areas of the city which had been central to decades of political conflict. The focus on perceptions of urban transformation meant that interviews did not gather detailed information about personal lives or family arrangements, instead concentrated on perceptions of change in the experience of living in and moving about the inner city.

Participants were recruited through voluntary and community organisations, including state-sponsored early years support centres, parent and toddler groups, and primary schools. Respondents were on average aged 26, with two children, at least one of which was of pre-school age (under four). Nine respondents combined mothering with paid work, six in part-time and three in full-time employment, typically in community, care, retail or catering jobs.

Research material was gathered by a fieldworker who had both social proximity to and distance from the research context. While she had grown up in another troubled part of the city, her status as a middle-class university researcher generated a social distance which seemed to take priority over that of ethno-nationality. Respondents spoke to her principally as a fellow mother, albeit from a different generation and social class, and took little interest in her ethno-nationality.

Multiple methods were adopted to maximise participation. These included non-participant observations, participant-directed photography, and semi-structured interviews with

individuals (24), friendship pairs (five) and one group of four friends. Pair and group interviews were carried out with those who indicated a preference for this method, for both ethical and practical reasons. Interviews mostly took place in community settings, often in spaces provided by gatekeepers. The material from interviews is the focus of analysis in what follows.

Managing Anxiety: Status and Stigma

I'm always scared of someone coming round and kidnapping them or something.
(Laura)

Anxiety about their own and their children's safety was commonly expressed by mothers in interviews. Concerns, typical of many urban contexts, focused on risks from traffic or sexual predators. The specific character of the place added a concern about keeping children away from sectarian rioting and police attention, and, above all, keeping them away from involvement with the 'anti-social' activities of young people in the neighbourhood.

The post-conflict context has changed the quality of these specific risk anxieties. Molly, for instance, a Protestant, worried that her son would be subjected to paramilitary violence from one of the various loyalist organizations, who tend to operate like urban gangs, competing within and between themselves for power in specific areas (Hamill 2011: 140-141):

It's not Protestants fighting with Catholics so much anymore, but if you mess with one person in an organisation that's it, you've got them all after you, you know. That would worry me about [my son] growing up ...

Nevertheless, mothers struggled to accurately evaluate potential threats to their children's safety in a changed, post-conflict context, and so feel that they were good, responsible parents. The worry that children could be abducted by strangers echoes parental anxiety in other contexts, generated by repeated moral panics (Bell 2002; Pain 2008). Carol's anxiety prompted her to exercise more physical surveillance of their activities than she feels is common in her neighbourhood:

I was born in this area [Catholic, Inner North] and I know a lot of people in it and I do feel safe in it and not as safe as I used to do and I don't feel safe for my children's point of view you know. [...] [N]ow they're allowed to play in the street in the summer, but I'm at the door like a stalker. Now I know they are young obviously anyway, but the rest of the parents in the street aren't like that, and in the other streets the kids are out running up and down [...] and I am like parked on the doorstep with a mug of tea watching them on their wee bikes, cos I don't feel safe for them with the traffic and I would always be afraid of somebody trying to put them into a car, and drugs is a big issue round here at the moment, which wasn't when I was growing up.

Carol feels herself to be acting differently from her neighbours, who she perceives as practising a 'free range', or what Annette Lareau describes as a 'natural growth', approach to parenting. This affords children a lot of spatial freedom and control over their time, in contrast with the 'concerted cultivation' approach adopted by middle class parents, involving the detailed management of children's time and activities (Lareau 2003: 5). The more intensive approach that Carol adopts is important for her claim to be a good mother, protecting her children from

harm as she allows them to play on the street. As her comments suggest, anxiety is a primary driver of her actions as a mother.

Dawn's reflections on how much spatial freedom she gives her growing children similarly illustrate the authority of more intensive parenting norms for her:

My wee boy is nearly 8 and he doesn't leave the street up until now, though last week I bought him a new phone so he can play in the next street where all his wee friends are. Now I'm still not 100% [confident about letting him do this], but my sister lives round there and [...] his friends' mummies [do too]. But you know it doesn't matter where you are, something could happen [...], and I would never forgive myself if anything happened to my kids and I wasn't there to help them, you know. So if they are out of my sight I need to know where they are.

Dawn's effort to manage her anxiety, so that she can allow her children a degree of independence, is not easy, and depends on setting up supervision networks, so that she can allow them more access to the world beyond the front door, a common parental strategy (Pain et al. 2005). It also depends on making a recognition claim about the quality of her parenting, in comparison with mothers who allow their children to be 'street reared':

... I know people will say 'Oh mine go to the park [by themselves]'. Well if my kids need to go to the park, I'll take them myself. 'Oh I just let them go on down', and I say 'Aye, you're just too bloody lazy to take them yourself, that's why'. Now don't get me wrong, that's just my perspective. *My kids aren't street reared*, by no means. [My italics]

The distinction Dawn draws between her own careful supervision and those mothers whose children who are 'street reared', involves making a stronger claim than Carol for recognition of the 'respectable' quality of her role performance. As McLaughlin has argued, a concern with respectability 'appears to be particularly significant in situations where prestige through occupational attainment is difficult to achieve' (1993: 563). June similarly drew a distinction between her own area and a neighbouring housing estate, commenting that '[i]t's like kitchen reared here, [...] I just think there is a wee bit more decency [in comparison to the housing estate].' June is arguing here that children are reared in their own kitchens in her area learn how to act 'decently', in contrast to the 'street reared' children of the housing estate, where attacks on strangers would not be unheard-of: '... you have to be rough over there, there are stereotypes [...] to live up to.' In this way, June and Dawn manage their risk anxiety by claiming recognition for the quality of their mothering, in June's case through direct comparison with the housing estate.

This contrast between 'street' and 'kitchen' child-rearing reflects similar distinctions found elsewhere. Mitchell and Green's working class respondents in the North East of England distinguished those children who play 'out the front' of their houses, on or in close proximity to the street, and, more respectably, 'out the back', in a more secured and supervised context (2002: 16). The prevalence of these sorts of status claims is not incidental to the wider politics of parenting. As Skeggs argues, '[r]espectability embodies moral authority: those who are respectable have it, those who are not do not' (1997: 3). The claim to respectability, moral authority and consequently status here, articulated by Dawn in terms of a more intensive style of mothering than her neighbours seem to employ, and by June as a more 'decent', domestically-focused style characteristic of her neighbourhood rather than specifically of

herself, is an important anxiety management strategy which is caught up with broader responses to the 'hidden injuries' of class stigma (Sennett and Cobb 1972); the politicization of unsupervised children in public places; and the privatization of risk (Beck 1992). It isn't surprising then that Dawn's recognition claim depends on affirming this contemporary version of the moral character of parenthood.

Such condemnations of the 'irresponsible' parent, who's 'street reared' children engage in anti-social behaviour, are caught up in what Goffman describes as the two-role process through which the 'stigmatized' and the 'normal' circulate in unrealized ways, prompting actors to either try and align themselves with one or other role, or detach from the situation (1963b: 163-4). That these are interaction roles, rather than simple characteristics of persons, means that participants in a situation can be perceived as performing one or other, regardless of how they might be perceived in other contexts. The potential stigma of being evaluated as a bad, irresponsible mother, as a result of the public behaviour of one's children, is an extremely painful experience, to be avoided if at all possible (Lynd 1958: 64).

Feeling that one is regarded as a good mother appears to require responses to risk anxiety, for instance through surveillance and management of children's social interactions. Laura and Jessica, living in a Protestant area, regretted to some extent the loss of paramilitary control over public order:

Years ago you wouldn't have got that much anti-social behaviour so you wouldn't have, but now it's just wild, cos they're getting away with it basically. [...] I think it's because all the paramilitaries have died down. Round here would be mainly UDA [Ulster Defence Association] and it's really died down now, where they can't, you know,

maybe go and beat people, [...] and I think that's why the kids are running about going mad to be honest with you. (Laura)

Karen, a Catholic, also worries about parents letting children 'go mad', as she puts it, in this changed context. For her, however, the rise in anti-social activity is caused not by a reduction in paramilitary control, but instead by a loosening of parental supervision in response to the ending of political violence:

I remember [...], I was terrified of any rioting or anything, terrified of the police when I was a kid [...]. [I]t always happened just outside our house, cos we lived [at a sectarian 'flashpoint'], so it always happened around our house, but I just watched it from the window, I would never dare go out near the door. I'm sure people in them days, some mummies obviously didn't care, but like there were people getting shot with rubber bullets [...], and I'm sure if they could have kept [their children] in[side] they would have. But now they [children] seem to be just going mad, just running about mad!

In Karen's view, mothers have abandoned their duty to protect children, in response to the emergence of peace, resulting in 'mad' anti-social behaviour. For some, anti-social activity has become the primary focus of maternal anxiety, as well as resentment:

...you see kids there, teenagers, and they're standing at the corner with joints and that in their hands, cannabis and stuff, and you're [thinking] like 'where's their mummies?' and stuff. Cos like, if my son had done it, like you'd murder [punish] him probably,

though it probably does no better. But I would definitely not want him to go down that road, never. (Jade)

The ambiguity Jade expresses about how to actually prevent young people from getting involved in drug taking doesn't detract from her strong conviction that good mothers should do their utmost to keep their children away from such activity, and that the mothers of these young people are failing in their duty to their children, as well as to their community. Parents of 'anti-social' children and young people are very much the focus of resentment and stigma, as they carry the blame for adding to the burden of respectable, responsible parenting in these neighbourhoods.

The condemnation of bad parents is captured in a conversation amongst a small group of mothers whose children all attend the same school in a Protestant area:

Kathy ... it's different now, they're being cheeky to their own. They're terrorising their own people in their own areas.

Sharon But I blame their parents like

Kathy Yes it is [the parent's fault] and that's what I said, the blame has to come back to the parents at a certain stage.

Vicky But it's not all parent's [responsibility].

Kathy No, that's not what I mean and I don't mean it in a bad way, but like if your child's twelve or thirteen and they're running about at 2 in the morning, why do you not know where they are?

Vicky Well my [son] was in bed at the weekend [...] and there was two kids from that area out at 3 in the morning, and I think one was thirteen and

one was fourteen or fifteen, calling my one to see if he could get out.

And one of them couldn't get into his own house...

[...]

Sharon But where were their parents?

A norm of parental responsibility is strongly affirmed here. While Sharon and Vicky have teenage as well as pre-school-aged children, and are sharply aware of the difficulties of managing their behaviour, the group nevertheless agrees that good parents know where their children are, make every effort to keep them safe, and prevent them from becoming a threat to others. Failure to do this is regarded as injuring the wider community, including other parents, who then must intensify their efforts to prevent their own children from getting involved.

The mothers here agree that parents are primarily responsible, over all other authorities, for the actions of their offspring, a poignant conclusion for Vicky in particular, whose teenage son had died as a result of a drug overdose. Nevertheless, the conversation confirms the normative expectation that the 'good' parent, implicitly the mother, bears responsibility for children's actions and characters. As Goffman reflects, 'stigma processes seem to [...] enlist[...] support for society among those who aren't supported by it' (1963a: 164).

The dynamics of maternal anxiety in the post-conflict era has shifted to some extent, as political and sectarian violence has declined. Fear that children could get caught up in violence appears to have been transformed into more a generalized anxiety about potential exposure to a variety of safety risks. This anxiety can be understood as the 'emotional tone' (Elster 1989: 128) of competing social norms, firstly that children should have more physical freedom than would have been possible during the Troubles, and at the same time, that good parents should protect

their children from sexual predators, reckless motorists, and ‘anti-social’ young people. Maternal efforts to position themselves as ‘normal’ by reproducing stigmatising processes, can be understood as an important strategy for responding to anxiety (Goffman 1963b: 163-4), and claiming status recognition.

Responding to Anxiety: Exit, Loyalty and Voice

The perception of risks outlined above, particularly of children becoming involved in sectarian and/or anti-social behaviour, tends to result in what Hirschman (1970) famously described as either an effort to ‘exit’, and find somewhere more ‘respectable’ to live, or a ‘voice’ response, whereby those who either have few exit options, and/or who feel loyal to the community, try manage their risk anxiety by engaging in activities intended to improve the quality of social life in the area.

Exit

The decision to exit inner-city neighbourhoods was not easy, involving a decisive move away from close-knit, face-to-face communities, where reciprocal social support and solidarity is a vital resource in the face of political conflict and multiple forms of deprivation (Shirlow and Murtagh 2006: 20-21). Similar to McKenzie’s research on St. Ann’s housing estate in Nottingham, a strong sense of pride in neighbourhood belonging, and an absence of expressed intentions to move away, was evident (2012: 469, 472). Nevertheless, some respondents did decide to exit.

Kylie, who lives at an interface, was planning to leave:

...where I live is actually on an interface at the moment so you know it's been quiet, but I'm not to say it's gonna stay that way. And that's another reason why I'm wanting to move, cos the kids are now more aware, they're that bit older, and I don't want them growing up with that. I want to make them feel as safe in their home as possible...

Kylie's sense of risk anxiety, as she raised her children in a Protestant interface community, was not alleviated by the dense social networks common in such places, where social capital has provided a crucial source of support and protection during the decades of violence (Leonard 2004). Instead, she worried that living in this close-knit neighbourhood meant that she had not adequately taught her children how to identify signs of danger and respond accordingly, so that they would not be able to keep themselves safe outside of the close-knit community:

Interviewer Would you say that your neighbourhood is close-knit?

Kylie Yes, very. Yes.

Interviewer And do you think that's a good thing?

Kylie Yes, it is a good thing, but then again *it might give my children a false sense of security* because I know everybody and my children know everybody, so when I move elsewhere I don't know whether they're gonna be overly friendly with neighbours, you know, when they shouldn't be. *So now I am going to have to un-teach what they've been used to and try to get it to go sort of the other way.* [my italics]

In order for her children to be safe, Kylie feels that she will need to re-educate them to be less trusting of the people they routinely encounter. While she has tried to protect them from

sectarianism, for instance by sending her youngest son to a mixed play-scheme, she is doubtful that this will be enough to keep him, or his older sibling, safe from involvement. She views the cross-community contact that the children's play-scheme provides as valuable. However, she seems unsure that 'contact' schemes such as this, which aim to resolve inter-group tensions by bringing people from each side together in an organised way, offer a long-term solution, despite common claims that they do (see, e.g., Amir 1969; Hewstone and Brown 1986).

In her effort to feel that she is mothering well, anxiety about sectarianism has taken priority. An important factor in Kylie's decision to exit is the continued presence of her ex-partner and his family in the area, which has reduced her sense of status and consequently her loyalty to the neighbourhood, making a move away more feasible by lowering the emotional costs of exit (Hirschman 1970: 78).

Kylie's plan to exit the inner city was not common amongst the mothers in this study. The strong sense of belonging to an urban village, characterised by close and frequent interaction and support, particularly with extended family members, constituted a strong incentive to remain, despite commonly expressed risk anxiety. As Hirschman put it, 'loyalty holds exit at bay and activates voice' (1970: 78). Consequently, mothers commonly sought to exercise 'voice' to influence the social character of their neighbourhoods, an important way of claiming recognition for their responsible mothering. This may explain why Kathy claimed that 'the women are the voice of the community really'.

Loyalty

Wendy talked about her loyalty to and sense of safety in a close-knit interface community. She had moved, with her partner, to another inner city Protestant area a few years before, but had been lonely and bored, and had eventually returned to her neighbourhood of origin:

No, no way [I didn't like the other area]. I went to work and then went home and sat in my bedroom, it was boring. I'm used to this [neighbourhood], this is my area I'm happier here. [...] I grew up here, this is where I'm from. I grew up in this area for 26 years.

While no longer unhappy, she nevertheless regrets that she is now not housed in the same street where most of her family live. Echoing attitudes of Londoners facing rehousing from the East End during the 1950s (Young and Willmott 1957), Wendy complains that she doesn't see family members as often as when they were 'just across the road'. She comments that the interface area where she grew up is where she feels safest and most at home: '... it's just my area and I always felt safer down here.'

This sort of reaction to brief experiences of moving even a few streets away was not uncommon, and many respondents recounted their sustained efforts to secure housing very close to where they grew up, where their extended families continue to live. Wendy's familiarity with her neighbourhood means that this is where she feels safest, irrespective of objective measures of risk of crime in the area.

A sense of loyalty to communities which have provided crucial support during the Troubles, combined with the long-term familiarity with the patterns of social life in these places, allowing inhabitants to interpret and participate in social life with some mastery, are important in

generating a sense of safety for many. While daily life tends to be inflected by risk anxiety, a strong desire to remain living in the inner city, including at interfaces, is evident. Mothers respond to risk anxiety by trying to influence change, both in how they raise their children and in how their areas work.

Voice

Kathy ... that's why I'm involved in community work [...], cos I want [this neighbourhood] to be a better place for my kids. I don't want my kids growing up in what I grew up in, which was rioting all the time. Your area wrecked, destroyed, you know what I mean?

Pearl Drugs, friends getting killed.

Being a good mother is not dependent on what Lawler (1999) described as 'getting out' of these neighbourhoods and 'getting away', in order to reduce risk anxiety. Instead, they respond to anxiety firstly by participating in the stigmatising work of defining 'good' and 'bad' mothers, and so claiming recognition for the quality of their own mothering. Secondly, mothers exercise 'voice' to make practical improvements to their environment.

The exercise of 'voice' took a number of forms, including trying and reducing the 'hardness' or 'bitterness' of sectarian attitudes in their own young children through supporting local 'contact' schemes, albeit with some reservations. As Jackie put it, 'I don't want [my son] to be bitter and that. Whenever I was growing up you had no choice you just didn't like Catholics, and I don't want that for my wee fella, definitely not.'

June had a similar attitude and sought to improve the quality of life in the inner city in quite direct ways. She had moved away from Northern Ireland as a young woman:

I remember thinking [that] if I had children I didn't want them here, cos [...] you were forced to join all these paramilitary [youth organisations], [...] every other child used to be involved in it and you either had to become a Christian or get out of the country to get out of it.

However, she had returned to live and raise her young family in the post-conflict era, and, among other things, had become involved in setting up a cross-community play scheme for toddlers in her area:

We have people coming in every week and when people get to know this, that it isn't that big [paramilitary mural] on the wall, [...] whatever. *It isn't that kind of hardness in the toddler group.* [my italics]

While somewhat surprised that women from diverse backgrounds were not put off by the prominent paramilitary murals on the external walls of the playgroup building, she nevertheless affirms the possibility of reducing the 'hardness' of sectarian attitudes through running such schemes for very young children.

The second focus of 'voice' amongst these mothers was on local anti-social activity. During interviews, various efforts to provide young people with places to go and activities to get

involved in were discussed. For example, much effort goes into keeping a youth club open late in the evening, despite the building being a regular target of break-ins and equipment theft.

The effort to do a good job as a mother, against a background of both community loyalty and risk anxiety, plays a crucial role in motivating these mothers' efforts to change the social dynamics of their neighbourhoods. As Kathy commented, 'I think if you're a parent too [...] you do want to [...] make this place a better place [...]. And not everybody wants to help, but there's that handful that say 'Well, we'll change the community', you know?'

Conclusion

The analysis presented here contributes to debates in sociology concerning the social significance of emotions, arguing that they do not simply indicate either a form of social conformity, or the strain of such conformity (e.g. Hochschild 2003), but that they are important aspects of interactive struggles for status recognition. Anxiety, understood as an indication of insufficient status and power, can provoke efforts to claim recognition for the former, in this context through the explicit affirmation of non-sectarian mothering. In other contexts which are free from sectarianism and a history of violent political conflict, claims for social status are likely to take a different form. The relative absence of alternative sources of power and status for those inhabiting Belfast's inner city makes non-sectarian mothering an important focus for making these recognition claims.

Consequently, while Belfast mothers in the inner city, like their counterparts elsewhere, worry about risks posed to children from motor traffic passing through residential streets, or from sexual predators, the concern about protecting children and young people from sectarian or anti-social activity is intensely felt. The quality of parenting has become the focus of much

attention, as the classed boundaries of respectability are reinforced and resentment builds against those who seem to let their children ‘run mad’.

For mothers raising young children in these circumstances, preferences about whether to remain or try to leave are not simply calculated in relation to objective measures of safety and danger. Instead, a sense of community loyalty, combined with the extent to which they feel at ease in these areas and able to claim recognition as good mothers, shapes attitudes to neighbourhoods. As Boal has argued, the combination of exit and voice responses to the social dynamics of residential segregation does reinforce social homogeneity (1976: 71). Although the ‘voice’ responses of women in this study tend to focus on non-sectarian mothering, for example by reducing the bitterness and hardness of inter-group attitudes, this may contribute towards softening the boundaries between communities. At the same time, a hardening in normative expectations concerning the moral duties of mothers is evident, not least through condemnations of those whose children grow up on the streets, rather than in their mothers’ kitchens.

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